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## Ritz-Carlton takes wraps off its plans

By [Kevin McQuaid](#)

EAST MANATEE COUNTY -- The Ritz-Carlton Sarasota plans to unveil a long-awaited, select membership plan today that aims to set a new benchmark for area golf and beach clubs.

Memberships costing \$75,000 to \$125,000 will be limited to 800, and include access to a Tom Fazio-designed golf course; a spa within the 266-room hotel and a \$30 million beachfront club on Lido Key.

Dovetailing with the membership announcement, the four-star hotel will provide details of the 325-acre, par 72 golf course, the most elaborate and expansive in a trio of amenities that will also be available to Ritz-Carlton hotel guests.

"It's going to be extremely exclusive in nature," Ritz-Carlton General Manager James McManemon said. "And it'll be the right number for the types of amenities and still allow us to provide a high level of service."

That exclusivity will extend to the 18-hole golf course. Of the 800 total memberships sold, only 300 will include golf access.

The Fazio-designed course is slated for completion around the end of next year. A clubhouse, including a pro shop, locker rooms, an upscale restaurant and a practice area, will debut in 2006.

The course, on Lorraine Road between University Parkway and State Road 70, near Lakewood Ranch, will feature 16 lakes and topographical elevations rising 15 feet in places, according to schematic details that will be shown today.

"This will be pure, uncompromised golf," said Fazio, who is among the nation's premier golf architects, having designed Professional Golf Association courses in Palm Beach Gardens and the Mediterra in Naples.

The memberships will be divided into three categories: Gold, Premier and Platinum. Gold memberships costing \$75,000 will allow full access to the beach and spa, and limited use of the golf course.

Gold members also will pay annual dues of \$3,600, a figure that will rise to \$4,800 when the course opens.

Platinum memberships will cost \$100,000, with yearly dues starting at \$3,600 and rising to \$10,800. Those members will not be charged greens fees, however.

Premier members will pay \$125,000, along with dues of \$600, which will rise to \$1,200 when the [golf component](#) opens.

Although the premier membership limits golf play to 30 days a year, it entitles members to spend up to 30 nights annually in the 266-room, luxury hotel at a significantly reduced rate.

"People who want service at the level we're providing will not find the prices prohibitive," McManemon said.

The membership fees have been anticipated since January, when the Ritz-Carlton debuted its beach club and unveiled plans for the golf course.

At the time, Ritz-Carlton officials said the membership rates would be revealed the following month. Andrea Kazanjian, director of the local Ritz-Carlton's members club, said the additional time was needed to work out details of the three-tiered memberships.

Since then, more than 1,200 have expressed interest in buying club memberships. Neither Kazanjian nor McManemon would say how many memberships have been sold to date.

The Ritz-Carlton club becomes the third exclusive fraternity planned for Sarasota and Bradenton, following announcements for the Founders Club and The Concession last year.

The Concession, a \$600 million project being developed by Ritz-Carlton principal Kevin Daves featuring 255 homes and a Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course, is being built on more than 1,200 acres in Manatee County. Its memberships, which will be capped at 300, will sell for \$75,000.

Founders Club memberships are also being limited to 300 at a cost of \$75,000. Its golf course and 24,000-square-foot clubhouse is being designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr.

The 700-acre project, on Fruitville Road three miles east of Interstate 75 in Sarasota, will also contain 262 home sites master planned by U.S. Assets Group.

The Ritz-Carlton club hopes to differentiate itself from Founders and the Concession by offering non-equity memberships, which won't be subject to operating or capital assessments.

Unlike either the Founders or Concession clubs, Ritz-Carlton membership deposits will be fully refundable upon members' resignations, and they will be reimbursed after 30 years of membership, McManemon said.

Perhaps the biggest difference between them, though, will be in their surrounding real estate. Neither Fazio nor the Ritz-Carlton developers intend to build homes near or around the Lorraine Road golf course.

For Ritz-Carlton and owners C. Robert Buford, Dan Buford and Daves, the membership plan and golf course construction mark the final pieces in a plan to evolve from a hotel to a full-service resort.

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